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SUBJECT: AUSTRIA'S NEW CABINET: MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE  
AND ENVIRONMENT NIKI BERLAKOVICH

¶1. (U) The following is a profile of Nikolaus ("Niki")  
Berlakovich of the conservative People's Party (OVP), who  
has been named Minister for Agriculture and Forestry,  
Environment and Water Management (also termed the "Life  
Ministry") in the new GOA cabinet.

#### Experience -----

¶2. (U) Berlakovich, an experienced local politician and  
parliamentarian in Austria's poorest state of Burgenland,  
was sworn in December 2 as Austria's agriculture and  
environment minister.

¶3. (U) Born on June 4, 1961, in Eisenstadt (Burgenland),  
Berlakovich has lived in that state for most of his life.  
After receiving his high-school diploma in 1979 he studied  
Agriculture and "Production of Plants" at the University of  
Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences in Vienna,  
where he graduated as engineer in 1985.

¶4. (U) He has spent most of his professional life in  
politics, specializing in agricultural issues. In 1991 he  
became a member of the state parliament of Burgenland. In  
1998 he took on the party manager job of Burgenland's OVP,  
but stepped down after an unsuccessful campaign in 2000.  
His political career was reborn with his appointment for  
OVP floor leader in the provincial parliament in 2002. In  
2005 he became Burgenland state minister for agriculture,  
environmental/animal protection, hunting, and water/sewage  
management. His political base is in the OVP Farmer's  
Association, where he has served as head of the Burgenland  
chapter since 2006.

#### Political/Economic Views -----

¶5. (U) Berlakovich has been virtually unknown on the  
national scene but is an experienced local politician. He  
has always worked in "grand coalitions" in Burgenland, so  
he knows that form of cooperation well. He is a member of  
the Croatian minority in Burgenland, speaks Croatian, and  
was spokesman for the minority in the Burgenland provincial  
parliament. He enjoys good relations with the other  
ethnic-Croatian GOA minister (Norbert Darabos (SPO)).

¶6. (SBU) Berlakovich will be a strong advocate for the  
interests of Austrian and European farmers, potentially  
lobbying for subsidies and against market access in WTO  
negotiations. In one of his first statements as Minister  
he opined that "farmers are those who preserve the basis of  
life, such as a healthy earth, air and water for the  
society." Berlakovich has also said Austria "will not move  
a millimeter" from its position that Austria's agriculture  
and food must remain "biotechnology-free" -- a "model" for

Europe in this regard. He will maintain the long-standing cordon against nuclear energy and is likely to speak out against any new nuclear power plant in neighboring countries and beyond. Berlakovich follows in the footsteps of Vice Chancellor/Finance Minister Josef Proell (who is also the new conservative party chief), so he will have his party's ear.

PERSONAL

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17. (U) Berlakovich is married (wife Ursula is a doctor) and has a son (17) and a daughter (15). His main leisure activity is playing soccer.

GIRARD-DICARLO